



Web 2.0 Meets the New-Age Professional

Jeanne C. Meister

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Being an advertising executive or a marketing manager is not what it used to be. Now, across these jobs and many others, professionals are beginning to realize they must be in charge of their own personal development.

Traditional courses — offered at either a corporate university or an accredited college — are becoming out of date at record speed. Instead, what is needed is a new approach to learning that uses Web 2.0 tools to continuously build your portfolio of competencies and skills.

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User-generated content now dominates all facets of our lives. Perhaps the best example is how Web 2.0 has changed the presidential political campaigns. All candidates now have MySpace pages, as well as videos on YouTube.

Sen. Hillary Clinton even asked YouTube viewers to vote on a theme song for her presidential campaign. The possible theme songs were viewed more than 900,000 times in a few months.

Learning professionals will be left behind if we remain solely with our linear production model of instructional design. We need to experiment with Web 2.0 tools for our learners.

I recently had a discussion with two heads of learning at vastly different organizations — Karie Willyerd, Sun Microsystems vice president and chief learning officer, and Raquel Suarez, DDB University dean — about how Web 2.0 could be used in their respective organizations.

Here are some “small experiments” they have in mind:

1. A wiki site on new-employee orientation that requests input from recently hired employees on what to include in future onboarding programs so that rather than spend six to nine months doing “research”

on what to include in a new-hire orientation program, the company will start by asking recently hired employees to provide their input and suggestions.

2. A podcast series that profiles subject-matter experts in various areas sharing their “top tips” in fewer than 10 minutes. At DDB, a global advertising agency, this means identifying experts who have been successful in co-creating with clients the definition a brand personality and building this into a campaign.
3. Computer technology used to explore blogs and push feeds to employees’ desktops so they can keep track of what consumers say about both their company and their client companies. Blogs are becoming an increasingly popular way for people to share information about products, and they offer companies a great source of consumer feedback.
4. A channel on your intranet site to have learners “rate” their courses, as Amazon.com does for books. Amazon became the No. 1 disruptive force in retail book selling by leveraging user-generated input into the latest offer. This also can be created for learners to provide fast and easy feedback into offerings and then aggregate these back to learners.
5. Finally, a private online community for the enterprise learning organization to share the latest ways Web 2.0 tools can be leveraged for corporate learning. Learning organizations often have yearly conferences for their global staff members. Often, though, these are not frequent enough and are too formal to capture useful online chatter.

This is just the beginning of the journey. The road will take us on many twists and turns — be prepared to experiment.

Additionally, start small and build a new mindset, one that focuses on making learning as fun and engaging as viewing some of your favorite YouTube videos. And send me a note on how you are using Web 2.0 in your learning organization — I’m eager to hear what you’ve done. ■

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